



LES CONTES D'HOFFMANN

Jacques Offenbach
Libretto by J. Barbier

Opera in a prologue, three acts and an epilogue (1881)
Sung in French

From Opéra de Paris (Opéra Bastille)

LIVE November 15, 2016 at 19h15 (Paris time)

Running Time: 3h 25min (with 2 intermissions of 20 min each)

CREATIVE TEAM

Conductor Philippe Jordan
Staged by Robert Carsen
Sets and costumes Michael Levine
Lights Jean Kalman
Choreography Philippe Giraudeau
Chorus Master José Luís Basso
Orchestra and Chorus of the Opéra de Paris

ARTISTIC TEAM

Hoffmann	Ramón Vargas
Olympia	Nadine Koutcher
Giulietta	Kate Aldrich
Antonia	Ermonela Jaho
La Muse Nicklausse	Stéphanie d'Oustrac
Une voix	Doris Soffel
Spalanzari	Rodolphe Briand
Nathanaël	Cyrille Lovighi
Luther Crespel	Paul Gay
Andrès, Cochenille, Pitichinaccio, Frantz	Yann Beuron
Lindorf, Coppélius, Dapertutto, Miracle	Roberto Tagliavini
Hermann	Laurent Laberdesque
Schlemil	François Lis

PRESENTATION

By the time he came to tackle the composition of *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*, Offenbach's opus already included more than a hundred operas. Left unfinished when he died during rehearsals in October 1880, his last work combines fantasy, gravity and humor in an unexpectedly innovative synthesis of opera buffa, romantic opera and grand opera. This adaptation of three tales by E.T.A. Hoffmann, with a sprinkling of Goethe's *Faust*, portrays the German poet as both narrator and hero recounting his love affairs with Olympia, Antonia and Giulietta. Robert Carsen's spectacular production highlights the melancholy genius of a man marked by life, with a coherence and dramatic

sense remarkable for a work that leaves numerous questions unanswered. Under the baton of Philippe Jordan, Sabine Devielhe, Stéphanie d'Oustrac, Kate Aldrich, and Ramón Vargas in the main role, interpret the legendary airs of this work whose brilliant mystery will continue to dazzle opera houses for countless years to come.

SYNOPSIS

Prologue

Hoffmann, a poet and composer, is in love with the prima donna Stella. As the opera begins, she is appearing in her most famous role: Donna Anna in Mozart's Don Giovanni. Hoffmann's Muse declares that she will win back the artist and protect him from any further amorous obsessions. In order to do so, she will assume the identity of Hoffmann's friend Nicklausse.

Counsellor Lindorf also desires the diva Stella, and he bribes her servant Andres into giving him a letter addressed to Hoffmann, which contains the key to her dressing room. As the curtain falls on Act I of Don Giovanni, Luther and his waiters hurriedly prepare for the arrival of Hoffmann and his friends. Hoffmann is in an agitated state of mind, but is soon persuaded to sing one of his songs: The Story of the Dwarf Kleinzach. As he sings, he is distracted and he recalls his first love. His friends bring him back to reality and he finishes the song.

Suddenly, Hoffmann sees Lindorf and a heated argument develops between them. Hoffmann reveals that Lindorf has always brought him bad luck. When three of the poet's friends boast about their mistresses, Hoffmann declares that Stella embodies three types of woman: the young girl, the artist and the courtesan.

Hoffmann asks his friends if they would like to hear about three of his past loves. Despite Luther's warning that the curtain is about to rise on the second act of Don Giovanni, the crowd fill their glasses and prepare to listen to Hoffmann's tales.

Act I - Olympia

The eccentric inventor Spalanzani is hoping that his latest invention, a mechanical doll called « Olympia », will earn him enough money to recoup his recent financial losses.

Hoffmann has fallen in love with Olympia from a distance, and when he and Nicklausse arrive, they are welcomed by Spalanzani and his assistant Cochenille. Nicklausse attempts to open Hoffmann's eyes to the truth about Olympia when Coppélius suddenly appears. He is the supplier of the doll's eyes, and he has returned to obtain payment from Spalanzani. Coppélius sells Hoffmann a pair of glasses which make everything seem more beautiful.

Spalanzani returns and Coppélius demands a share of the profits from their new invention. To get rid of him, Spalanzani gives him a worthless cheque. Guests now arrive and Spalanzani presents his "daughter" to them. She attracts great admiration, particularly for her singing. Hoffmann is completely enchanted by her, and when they are left alone he declares his love. Nicklausse again attempts to bring Hoffmann to his senses. Coppélius returns vowing revenge on Spalanzani for having cheated him.

Hoffmann dances with Olympia. The doll's mechanism gets out of control and she whirls Hoffmann in a frenetic dance. He falls and breaks his glasses and the doll is taken away. Suddenly Cochenille rushes in: Coppélius has taken his revenge on Spalanzani by destroying Olympia. Hoffmann discovers that his beloved was a mechanical doll as the guests laugh uproariously...

Act II - Antonia

The violinist Crespel has moved in order to keep his daughter Antonia away from Hoffmann. As the tale begins, Antonia sings a song about lost love. Her father interrupts her, making her promise not to sing any more: Antonia has inherited her mother's fatal illness as well as her love of singing.

Before going out, Crespel instructs his servant Frantz not to let anyone into the house. However Frantz is deaf and so readily admits Hoffmann and Nicklausse. Nicklausse sees a violin and begins to play it, while Hoffmann sings a song he once wrote for Antonia. When she appears, they rediscover their passion and decide to marry. Crespel returns unexpectedly and Antonia rushes away to her room. Hoffmann decides to hide.

Suddenly Dr. Miracle appears. He wishes to continue his mysterious treatment of Antonia, but Crespel accuses him of having intentionally killed his wife and now attempting to kill his daughter.

Now aware of Antonia's fragile health, Hoffmann persuades the reluctant girl to give up her hopes of a stage career. No sooner does he leave than Dr. Miracle reappears. He describes the fame that awaits her on the opera stage, and when Antonia hears her dead mother's voice exhorting her to sing, she can no longer resist. As the scene reaches its climax Crespel, Hoffmann and Nicklausse rush in, but they are too late: Antonia is already dead...

Act III - Giulietta

In Giulietta's bordello a party is in progress. Nicklausse and Giulietta celebrate the pleasures of the night. This languid mood is not to Hoffmann's taste, and, in a cynical drinking song, he rejects love.

Dapertutto tempts Giulietta with a magnificent diamond which he promises to give her if she will obtain Hoffmann's reflection for him, just as she earlier obtained the shadow of her present lover, Schlemil.

Giulietta proceeds to seduce Hoffmann. She begs him to give her his reflection as a proof of her love. Hoffmann readily agrees, but is later horrified when he realises what he has lost. Nicklausse attempts to drag the poet away, but Hoffmann finds himself unable to leave Giulietta.

Schlemil discovers Hoffmann and Giulietta together. The two men fight a duel and Hoffmann kills his rival, only to discover Giulietta leaving with her pimp Pitichinaccio. Dapertutto adds to their mocking laughter...

Epilogue

La Stella sings "Mi Tradi" Don Giovanni's famous aria.

As Hoffmann concludes the last of his three tales, the performance of Don Giovanni has ended in the theatre. Hoffmann is now completely drunk. When Stella arrives in triumph, he can barely speak to her. The Diva leaves on Lindorf's arm.

The Muse now reappears. She instructs Hoffmann to rekindle the fire of his art, reminding him that tears are even more inspiring than love.